



International FORUM on Development Service
FORUM International du Volontariat pour le Développement

International Volunteering and Co-operation

New Developments in Programme Models

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Cover note:

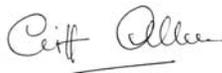
A special note for IVCO 2007 delegates. This is not the final paper, we have decided to distribute this draft version, to look for feedback to strengthen the paper for future use. It was not possible to verify all data and it is recognised there are some areas this paper in its current state does not cover.

Foreword

This is the first in a series of discussion papers produced by FORUM, which follows on from our research work on trends in International volunteering and co-operation in recent years. One of the key trends identified in this time has been the increased variation and diversification in the programmatic models that International Volunteer and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs) use.

This paper aims to consider some of those models, what we can learn from those experiences and identify some challenges for the future.

The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of FORUM or its members or of the organisations for whom the author works. The responsibility for these views rests with the author alone.



Cliff Allum, President of FORUM

About FORUM

International FORUM on Development Service is a network of organisations engaged in international volunteering and personnel exchange. FORUM aims to share information, develop best practice and enhance co-operation between its members.

FORUM's members include both non-governmental (NGO) and state organisations from around the world.

The main activities of FORUM include the following:

- We facilitate the sharing of information, through our website, news updates, sharing of knowledge and experiences.
- We commission and undertake research, as well as facilitating members' involvement in research into issues around international volunteering.
- We organise an annual conference for heads of agencies known as IVCO. This conference is primarily concerned with issues of change, redefining international volunteering and offering opportunities to learn about new models of activity.

Context

In 2006, FORUM commissioned a research project on recent trends in international volunteering and co-operation. This was presented in Bonn, Germany in October 2006. It contained an important acknowledgement that there was now a decided and clear break with the past.

“In the past, International Volunteer Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs) typically focused on volunteer sending. Today however this mould has been broken and IVCOs are now engaging in a wide range of activities including advocacy, public engagement, focusing on South-South co-operation and a range of short and long-term volunteer placements. This evolution can, in part, be put down to IVCOs ability to respond to changes in donor practice and in the wider political environment.”¹

What was the mould that was being broken? We have to go back nearly fifty years to understand this and its significance. The model for IVCOs is often tracked back to the launch of Peace Corps in the 1960s, a legacy of the Kennedy era of US politics, which sparked a dramatic growth in international volunteering.² A report by the Overseas Development Institute concluded that by 1966, there were 160 organisations sending about 17,000 volunteers to developing countries.³ And why were they being sent?

“It is possible to think of volunteer programmes in terms of sending philanthropic people to places where they can do charitable jobs – and maintaining them there at minimal cost...Volunteer programmes have increasingly come to be thought of in terms of three additional objectives; aid for development, public relations between countries, and a form of education for volunteers themselves”⁴

Somewhat presciently, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) recognised the problems in these objectives, which “have become multiple, sometimes confused, not always compatible.”⁵

But perhaps as a sign of the optimism of western capitalism the mid 1960s, that the world’s problems could be cured by economic growth on its own model, the ODI report is unequivocal about the main value of international volunteering as a “valuable and inexpensive addition to other technical assistance programmes.”⁶ And on this basis, a model entirely recognisable to today’s IVCOs and volunteers can be seen – the essential case for a two year model for volunteers providing technical assistance, a subsidised benefits package, training and adaptation prior to placement - which were set out in its recommendations.⁷

¹ “Trends in international volunteering and co-operation” *Development Initiatives 2006*

² Although many have earlier histories. Some trace back to the first world war as an example of workcamps, others more as part of the post second world war “new world order” and the building of relationships between nations and communities. But the model of long-term development volunteering is really based in this era.

³ “Volunteers in Development” Adrian Moyes (ODI, 1966)

⁴ *ibid*,p9

⁵ *ibid*, p9

⁶ *ibid*,p7

⁷ And a glance at the appendix shows how familiar some of the organisations of the 1960s are today. They include CUSO, JOCV, VSO, DED, AFVP and the US Peace Corps amongst others

This characteristic model of the two year international volunteer, sent from the North to the South, became a widespread and highly robust model for decades and remains significant today throughout Asia, Europe and North America in the activities of many IVCOs. It is this “mould”, however, that is being broken, at least in part.

Over the past fifty or so years, a number of pressures have shaped the model of international volunteering. It is often – and still is - rooted in visionary, solidarity, or religious inspired energies.⁸ Not many International Volunteering programmes started life as primarily secular technical assistance programmes, but a fair few have ended up on that path. The drivers for that have been interesting – on the one hand the recipients asking (or demanding) that people who come as volunteers can contribute specific skills (a more demand led model) is matched by donor preoccupation to slot International volunteering into the technical assistance box with objectives of poverty reduction, rather than solidarity. Arguably, the trend in recent years to focus on the outcomes of international development activity in terms of poverty reduction has influenced both a move to enhanced professionalism of international volunteering on one hand and encouraged the emergence of new models on the other.⁹

Some IVCOs have been comfortable with the professional route. Indeed, some have renounced the model of international volunteering in favour of a more consultancy based model. One of the most dramatic examples is that of SNV. In their own words:

“The rich, 40-year heritage of SNV has its roots in the spirit of voluntarism. As our experience accumulated and youthful enthusiasm matured into real expertise, our organisation became professional and we stayed closely linked to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. SNV set a new course for itself and became an independent foundation. We deliberately moved out of project execution and started advisory activities.”¹⁰

Others have embraced the technical assistance agenda and have emphasised the use of terms such as *development workers* rather than *volunteers* and define the people on their programme as professionals, as indeed they are. They may not be *development professionals*, but they are very likely to be *‘professional’* in their own sphere.

Alternatively, IVCOs have responded to this and other pressures by making radical changes to focus on partnership across communities and societies in which volunteering takes place.

The drive for better skilled people to meet the development challenges of partner organisations in developing countries has seen a change in the profile of international volunteers. For many years, for example, all the main UK agencies have experienced an increasing average age for international volunteers (which arguably can be a proxy indicator for certain kinds of skills and experience). Not only the ‘gap-year’ model for students taking a year off from their studies disappeared, but also those with insufficient work experience, replaced by the experienced professional at the end of their career who wanted to give something back.

⁸ These themes are more fully explored in “The Future of International Volunteering” Cliff Allum (2000).

⁹ The debate about professionalism and long term international volunteering can be pursued elsewhere in “International Volunteering and Professionalism,” Cliff Allum (unpublished paper, 2006) and “Strategic Resourcing in Humanitarian NGOs: Towards the coexistence of Professionalism and Voluntarism?” conference report produced by VOICE, July 2006

¹⁰ “Connecting People’ Capacities”, SNV (undated, but post 2000)

But now a second main strand of change is taking place – the recruitment of international volunteers from throughout the world by organisations that historically recruited people from the “home” country of that organisation. Again (leaving aside UNV as a special case), it is the UK agencies that lead the way. In VSO, International Service, Progressio and Skillshare International people from outside the UK are in the majority on their international volunteer programmes. The reason? In part it could be supply, but in the main it is because the skills and experience of the people being recruited are more appropriate to the environment they will work in.

So, what we see are trends in diverse directions. If we counterpoise on one hand the adoption of the professional development worker and on the other a move towards the international understanding and solidarity, these objectives seem pretty similar to the challenges ODI outlined forty years. What seems to be different is the willingness and ability to challenge the models in the light of experience.

If we focus on professional development workers, why in the 21st century reality does it need to be someone who is there for two years? Why not have variations in the length of placements in line with the demands of the individual situation? And where should they go from and to where? And in a world of on-line communication, do they need to go at all? It is these kinds of questions that have prompted a review of the traditional model as an arm of development intervention.

Again, alternatively, if the challenge is public engagement, to challenge views and attitudes in the North and focus on the experiences of international volunteers, there are a different set of questions. Why send people one way, why not use exchange models? Why not lever up the public engagement agenda in the work of individuals involved in volunteering? And how do we engage with a new generation of people, rather than follow the trend of sending an aging group of development workers?

However, as Development Initiatives have described it, the ability of IVCOs to respond to external changes can only be one part of the story. There are many people, often young people, who are seeking a development experience and with opportunities restricted by the traditional model, they inevitably look elsewhere. The gap has been filled in part by the private sector.

“The number of private sector providers for volunteer opportunities has substantially increased over the last five years. These providers present opportunities for potential volunteers to take part in short or long term placements in an area of interest to them.”¹¹

Given the potential in a capitalist society to channel activities into commodities, together with the dramatic changes in global communications, it is not surprising that a cursory search on Google can generate website opportunities for people to engage in “meaningful” development opportunities and pay for doing so. The growth of private sector organisations is significant, but also the growth in new voluntary organisations that are seen as more responsive to the needs of those who wish to take up a volunteering challenge abroad.

¹¹ Op cit Development Initiatives, 2006

The unique selling point of such organisations may well sit in a very different place to the development agendas of many IVCOs. For example, this is taken from a website that is set up as an interface between those seeking international volunteering experience and those who are providers:

“By volunteering abroad you will learn so much about yourself. You will do things that you never imagined you were capable of. The biggest difference you will notice at the end of the program will not be external but will be the difference inside of yourself. In most cases residents could do your job better, faster and more efficiently. You probably won't teach the locals how to hammer a nail, but you will share your friendship with them. Most importantly, you will be changed forever because you will have a greater understanding of another culture, you will challenge your personal limits, and you will develop friendships.”¹²

Programme models – how they have changed and developed

In this section, we look a little more in depth at some of the developments of specific IVCOs in working with models that have either refined or challenged the traditional orthodoxy.¹³

Refining the technical assistance model

One central challenge for the use of international volunteers as a model for technical assistance is that the motivation of those involved is driven more by the concern for humanity as much as the productive impact or outcome. Mark Goldring, CEO of UK agency VSO, captured the dilemma well in this discussion of Malawi in 2005:

“It was a tough decision to start pulling out of supporting health care provision in one of the world's poorest countries, but pulling out is what VSO felt it had to do in Malawi in early 2004. Volunteers were working in such a dysfunctional situation that they could neither deliver effective care themselves nor contribute effectively to strengthening it for the future.

The trauma of having the skills to make a difference as to whether patients lived or died, but not even having the drugs or infrastructure to provide basic treatment made volunteers' roles impossible. And while we were involved in some sensible staff training programmes, few of those trained in professional roles stayed in the public health system longer than they had to.”¹⁴

This leads to a discussion about sustainability and many IVCOs have positioned themselves as capacity builders, rather than as gap fillers and in the mainstream of development – not emergency relief. In turn this has challenged the idea of providing a mass of people to undertake positions without any realistic understanding of what happens when they leave. This is a world of careful placement assessment, key interventions, using experienced management, financial and professional advisors, training trainers rather than being the frontline staff and measuring effectiveness.

¹² Volunteerabroad.com – website June 2007

¹³ It is not possible to reflect all the developments and some organisations receive higher profiles than others.

¹⁴ “Gap-filling or life-saving”, Mark Goldring, CEO VSO, unpublished paper to IVCO 2005. VSO in fact re-established its programme in Malawi.

Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED) is one example of an IVCO who has defined its role in terms of placing “professionally experienced and socially committed specialists at the disposal of developing countries.”¹⁵

DED runs a programme of around 1,000 development workers in 40 different countries. Although formally separate from the German government, it operates under its aegis and in recent years has worked increasingly closer with the development co-operation arm of the government, GTZ, in the decisions on development worker placements. Essentially DED is the partner in the government’s development programme that provides specialist technical and professional skills. This interconnectedness is articulated by GTZ:

“To bundle know how for optimal results in its work, GTZ cooperates closely with other organisations involved in development policy. These include the German Development Service (DED), Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung GmbH – Capacity Building International, Germany (InWEnt), German Finance Company for Investments in Developing Countries (DEG) and – above all – the KfW Entwicklungsbank (development bank). The latter is responsible under commissions from the BMZ for financial co-operation with partner countries. Together with other interface organisations like the KfW, DED and InWEnt, we have numerous shared offices, for example in Egypt, Vietnam, Manila, India, Jordan, Guatemala and countries in Southern Africa. They facilitate local coordination of technical and financial co-operation and relations with joint partners.”

In this context, the element of voluntarism is less clear. While the motivation of individual development workers may be within the volunteering tradition, the relationship with the organisation can become one that is harder to define. Sustaining the sense of movement alongside a focused development programme on technical and professional assistance is a challenging task.

Beyond North-South models

The historic models of international volunteering have not only been North-South, but very often from one nation state to the South. It is rare to find a variation on this even today in many governmental funded IVCO programmes, not least because the governments that provide the funding want to see it used on the citizens of that country for a range of reasons. Only the UNV programme, which is essentially a multinational programme, stands as a long established programme outside of this framework.

However, the nation state model has gone hand in hand with a level of pragmatism for many years. There are *some* exceptions. But more recently, the opportunity to move outside the nation state model has come strongly onto the agenda for those countries in the European Union, where the potential problems of discriminating against citizens of other member states effectively loosened the restrictions on recruitment.

In the UK, this had a particular impact, coming together, as it did, with a willingness to adopt a pragmatic approach where necessary – the international volunteer programme run by Progressio in the Yemen has for many years been sourced by Somalis – and a refocusing of the development agenda on outcomes, rather than inputs. Intentionally or

¹⁵ DED website June 07. There are other expressed aims, but this is the one listed first.

not, the DfID of the UK Government, under new political leadership, turned attention away from where international volunteers came to what they achieved when they arrived. In consequence, this liberated all the UK agencies to recruit not just outside Europe, but worldwide.¹⁶

In 1990, VSO set out on the path of recruiting people from countries in Asia (Philippines) and Africa (Kenya and Uganda) that they had previously sent volunteers to.

“This was an explicit recognition that people living in poor countries also had skills and experience to share, that they had a right to participate in volunteering and that both the volunteering community and the volunteering paradigm would grow richer for their inclusion”¹⁷

However, this also hit against the challenge that this would contradict the values of VSO and its objectives of technical co-operation, by taking skills from developing countries. How VSO managed this is instructive: the recruitment was focused on a limited number of countries and in areas of skills and experience that the country was in a position to share without ostensible domestic impact. For example, the success of East Africa in dealing with the threat of HIV and AIDS was used to good effect in volunteers from Kenya and Uganda going to Southern Africa. And the experience of addressing HIV and AIDS in an African context was certainly arguably more than could be offered from the UK.

But this is also a step change in organisational practice. VSO's projections were that by 2005-6, some 25 per cent of long term volunteers would come from Kenya, Uganda, India and the Philippines. However, by 2007, VSO were estimating some 50 per cent of their long-term development programme came from non-UK sources. This dramatic change has been based on a model that is essentially the same system applied in new contexts. The terms and conditions are the same in each country, irrespective of where the volunteer comes from. And it builds upon a model of defined recruitment points, both in the North and the South. However, the diversification must inevitably impact on the resource needs of VSO (e.g. in the recruitment and selection resources and facilities in the UK) and its organisational culture with the emergence of a multi-national volunteer group.

At the same time, other UK agencies also pursued strategies in their own style. Skillshare International, working historically in Southern Africa, had facilitated recruitment in Southern Africa for many years, and did not insist on all potential volunteers being recruited through the UK centre. This had seen instances of South to South volunteering, e.g. recruiting Nigerian doctors to work in Mozambique, but on the whole the volunteer group was drawn from the UK. If the *opportunity* to change came from a relaxation in DfID policy, the *pressure* to change derived from the programme itself. The critical moment came, when an integrated project and volunteering programme in technical and vocational education was struggling and it was mutually recognised with the partner organisation that the experiences of staff from other African based environments could prove more effective than those from a UK-based environment. In effect, this unlocked the old model.

¹⁶ This challenged not just *who* is recruited, but *where* they are recruited.

¹⁷ “International volunteering: an evolving paradigm”, Brian Rockcliffe in *Voluntary Action* Vol 7 No2

On this model, while volunteers have to be recruited from outside of the host country, there are no specific points of recruitment, with any Skillshare office able to recruit volunteers. The challenge with such a model is the consistency of practice and systems and the level of available skills – and less obviously the enhanced role of the partner organisation and the consequent impact on how decisions are reached. At 2007, Skillshare International recruits nearly 50 per cent of its volunteers from non-European sources, similar to VSO. Progressio and International Service have even higher ratios.¹⁸

The longer term consequences of a growing proportion of South to South volunteering inevitably impacts on the programme in the UK, since quite simply less volunteers return, which may in turn impact on the development awareness agendas in the UK. It may, of course, generate greater development awareness in other parts of the world, but balancing programmatic objectives is not straightforward. In addition, there may be an even bigger issue as the organisational resourcing and culture are affected. The logic is towards truly international organisations, rather than nation state organisations, but that in turn poses significant dilemmas and contradictions.

Exchange / partnership model

The issue of reciprocity has a long history in international volunteering, notably in the theoretical exchange of skills and ideas between the volunteer and their counterpart(s). However, the direction of travel has been one way and from the outset this has had an inevitable paternalist tone.

It may be a sweeping generalisation, but if the ideology of the North has been to assume the people of the South would be grateful for their support, including that of volunteers, it has too often gone hand in hand with a suspicion that people from the South are intending to go a little too far in wealth redistribution if they come to the North – the vista of immigration and xenophobia runs deep in too many communities and countries of the North.

So, for many agencies funding reciprocal visits has been hard to resource or donors have not seen it as a priority amongst addressing the challenges of poverty reduction in the developing world. Despite this, in recent times, two organisations have independently developed a similar exchange model.

FK Norway represents a significant organisational rejection of the traditional sending model. The Norwegian Volunteer Service was founded in 1963 and essentially continued until for forty years. But in 2001, a new organisation emerged, Fredskorpset, now renamed FK Norway, which replaced the traditional ways of working. The long term volunteer model had seen a growing age group of development workers, reliving their

¹⁸ A more radical model for South-South is operated by FK Norway. "South-South Programmes in a Fredskorpset context means the exchange of participants in partner networks between two or more countries which appear on the current DAC list of developing countries. The partners in the network elect between them a primary partner in the South, that acts on behalf of the network and carries its duties and responsibilities vis-à-vis Fredskorpset. The primary partner can act both as a facilitating or recruiting partner."

"The responsibility for formulating objectives for the exchanges, and for their planning and implementation rests with the partners themselves. Fredskorpset will assist the partners in achieving these objectives by providing guidance and funding." FK Norway website June 2007.

experiences, but its future and relevance were challenged. FK Norway was the new model for the future.

Central to this approach is partnership between organisations in the North and the South, and between those in the South. It is not a volunteer programme as such, but supports voluntary action between partners, who can come from the private, state or community sectors. FK Norway essentially support the relationships to function and facilitate the voluntary exchange of personnel between the partner organisations.¹⁹

“Companies in Norway and in the South form a partnership, which, with funding from Fredskorpset, exchanges personnel and expertise within the same sector or line of work. It is the partnership that sets the goals for the exchange and assumes responsibility for planning and implementation of the Fredskorpset project. The partnership recruits, sends and receives the participants. Fredskorpset assists in project development as well as quality control. It funds the project wholly or in part, and coordinates training and follow-up activities for participants in conjunction with the partnership. Fredskorpset invites the partners to participate actively in its international network.” FK Norway Primary Programme as shown on website, June 2007

This opens up the potential of a broader based engagement, where the work is driven by the partners, not FK Norway, but also enables engagement between communities in both locations. Development is one concern, but public engagement features strongly as well. FK Norway focuses on the 25-35 age group, but has specialist programmes for youth and seniors.

Canadian Crossroads International works in a similar way.

“Canadian Crossroads International facilitates the coming together of people and organisations. Through international volunteering and partnership, CCI leverages skills, expertise and resources necessary to address these global challenges... The exchange of skilled volunteers and staff is central to the partnerships. Each year CCI brings partners from developing countries to work with partners in Canada, sends Canadians to work with partners in the South and facilitates staff and volunteer exchanges between Southern partner organisations. Placements vary in length from several weeks to a year depending on the needs of the project.”²⁰

The variation is that CCI retains a volunteer programme that is open and available to apply for, but the essential elements of exchange and reciprocity, and the aims of its work, clearly situate it alongside FK Norway.

The challenges of such models ultimately concern the available interest and resources in the programme, especially in facilitating reciprocity, as well as the objectives of the programme as a whole being consistent with those of individual partnerships.

¹⁹ This centrality of partnership has echoes elsewhere, see for example in the reinvention of MS in “solidarity through Partnership” MS, 2001.

²⁰ CCI website June 2007

Bringing in young people

One major challenge faced by the traditional volunteer sending model is the one of a general and gradual increase in the average age of volunteers. For many IVCOs, this demographic change has gone hand in hand with the desire to recruit more experienced and skilled volunteers, who are likely to be older. The young people who have resources can buy an experience as we discussed earlier, but what about those who cannot afford it, especially those in the South? Demographic projections also suggest that in many developed countries, the catchment group for volunteers will be the older age group in the years ahead.²¹

In recent years, Canada World Youth has led the way in international youth programmes that have a development focus. Their model has been applied elsewhere in Australia and the UK. This is how it works:

“The core program is six to seven months in length – half happens in Canada and the other half overseas. During the program, you and your counterpart (a young person from the exchange country) get involved in your host community through volunteer service and you live together in a host family. You also participate in educational activities with members of your group, permitting you to enrich and increase your understanding of global and local issues. You soon realise just how much you can learn by becoming active in your community! It’s an unforgettable intercultural and educational experience that enriches your knowledge and helps you develop new skills”²²

But the model of exchange is a costly one, and the eyes of governments may look elsewhere.²³

The concentration on technical assistance and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), or indeed any development objectives, has challenged the idea of young people with limited experience being central to long-term international volunteering. Southern partners are often looking for people who will contribute to their challenges, rather than acting as a source of experience for others to benefit from.

Yet the challenge of creating a constituency that will engage with the issues facing developing countries does demand a programme of public engagement and young people are an obvious target in this respect. So, we enter the domain of the parallel universe and the re-emergence of the volunteer programme for young people that is not primarily aimed at development objectives in the South, but raising awareness in their country of origin.

In 2007, both the German and UK governments launched consultation processes on youth volunteering. The consultative proposals from the German government were stunning. Based on the analysis of public engagement in the DAC report, the proposal was to send 12,000 young German people to developing countries with the explicit objective of them utilising that experience and understanding upon their return to Germany. The UK government, after years when the use of DfID funds for youth

²¹ Development Initiatives 2006

²² Canada World Youth website June 2007.

²³ For instance each year, CWY recruits approximately 400 young Canadians to take part in the Core and Africa-Canada Eco-leadership Programs

volunteer programmes was explicitly prohibited has included this objective in a recent Policy document and at the time of writing is in the process of seeking ideas prior to setting out their ideas. The expectation is that it will share some similarities with the German model.

The use of international volunteering for young people has often been seen as advantageous for the sending country. For example, even from the outset, the restriction of recruiting Peace Corps volunteers to a small number of universities arguably illustrates the significance of building the leaders of tomorrow with a world view. Such experience is not available for most young people, either in the South or North. Fundamentally, there is an issue of access as well as the quality and objectives of the programmes, and this underpins the discussion of youth programmes.

Short-term / leave franchise

The long held view has been that it takes a long time to do effective work as an international volunteer – time to acclimatise, understand the new environment in which the volunteer is now located, perhaps learn a language. However, the model that focuses on outcomes can suggest that short-term interventions may be useful to achieve some outcomes, if not all of them. It also has the potential of releasing contributions from a different pool – those in the corporate world.

Programmes for short-term professional interventions have been around for a long while, as evidenced in the work of Executive Services Overseas in their various national guises. But often these programmes and organisations have been somewhat separate from their long term counterparts or have been separately administered programmes. The incorporation of BESO into VSO in 2005, however, is an indicator of how an integrated model of long and short term volunteers might be possible.

More widely, the interest in short term placements is located in the relationship between the IVCOs and the Corporate Sector, which is certainly a challenging one. As Development Initiatives reported:

“There has previously been some resistance to the idea of working closely with the corporate sector. However, IVCOs are increasingly engaging and there are numerous practical examples of projects with the corporate sector within the FORUM membership. Uniterra for instance have developed their ‘Congé Solidaire’ (leave for change) programme which provides short-term, well defined tasks for participants. VSO (now in conjunction with BESO) and UNV are also operating partnership schemes with businesses such as Pricewaterhouse, Accenture and Kraft. Fredskorpset are working closely with international consultancy firms and Oxfam Quebec have developed a partnership youth development scheme with Cirque du Soleil.”²⁴

There is also an issue on the supply side:

“Volunteers are no longer always willing to go for two to three years due in some cases to economic constraints in their home country or improved job opportunities... Short term placements by contrast have increased as employers

²⁴ Development Initiatives, op cit, p 8

are often happy to allow their employees three weeks to a month of leave to take part in a volunteer programme.”²⁵

Online Volunteering

It is almost superfluous to say that our current models of international volunteering were developed prior to the internet; but in time it will be increasingly less obvious that they were developed before the age of modern computers. Such changes have revolutionised our ways of working and living. It would be naïve to think that international volunteering will remain unaffected.

Development Initiatives in their trends research concluded:

“On the positive side, access to the internet means that volunteers can ‘shop around’ for opportunities and gain a better understanding of the organisation and country before they embark on their placement. It also means that organisations such as UNV can harness the potential of ‘virtual volunteering’, enabling volunteers to share competencies in areas such as research, design, proposal writing and giving legal or environmental advice from their homes. UNV currently has 5,000 volunteers providing online assistance. Other IVCOs note that volunteers are able to continue staying involved in development upon returning from their placements.”²⁶

UNV have led the way in the area of on-line volunteering within the established development sector. Started as a pilot at the turn of the century the UNV “on-line volunteer (OV) service connects, over the Internet, development organisations with volunteers worldwide and supports their effective online collaboration.”²⁷

UNV in 2005 claimed 50,000 registered users, 810 host organisations, 2,500 assignments, and 2,000 online volunteers, comprising 167 nationalities, 60 per cent of whom are women and 40 per cent of whom are from developing countries.²⁸

The work undertaken by on-line volunteers is wide-ranging. They provide technical expertise and tools, support the management of project and resources, contribute to developing and managing knowledge and facilitate communication and networking.

Are there any downsides to the impact of the internet? Development Initiatives found that

“There were however some negative points raised by IVCOs. Cheap and easy access to the internet can mean that volunteers don’t integrate so well into their overseas placement. Furthermore, IVCOs are now receiving more enquiries than ever which is impacting on their ability to respond effectively and is placing a strain on their human resources.”²⁹

²⁵ development Initiatives, op cit, p 9

²⁶ Development Initiatives, op cit, p 7

²⁷ UNV presentation to IVCO 2006

²⁸ UNV ibid

²⁹ Development Initiatives op cit, p 7

Despite the downsides, it is hard not to imagine that as people increasingly use the internet to travel independently, that they will also use it to pursue international volunteering independently. It is arguably part of a wider shift to the consumerist focus, where people seek the best available product if they want to travel, but perhaps more importantly, it gives them the opportunity to contribute if they do not or cannot. Will a generation brought up on the likes of 'My Space' see the lack of face to face contact and physical presence as barriers to being an "international" volunteer?

Key future trends

Insofar as past trends provide a guide for the future, the Development Initiatives survey have identified a range of areas that they regard as significant over the past five years.

Putting that in context, it is also worth noting that they concluded:

“On the whole, over the past five years there has not been a significant change in how governments and the general public perceive international volunteering. They value IVCOs experience of working with grassroots organisations, the positive aspects of face to face engagement and harnessing the potential for individuals to contribute to society”³⁰

International volunteers are great ambassadors for their countries. They are the human face of development and retain great potential in this regard:

“At the level of practice, by fostering person-to-person communication in the international arena around common themes of global justice, development and international solidarity, international volunteering can perhaps provide a humanising force in the face of the rapid and impersonal forces of global change.”³¹

But what of the specific conclusion and how do they impact on the programmatic models for the future? Critically, it is useful to consider the model of international volunteering as a whole; who will be the volunteers of the future; what will be its objectives and who will it benefit.

The social form of international volunteering

It is important to recognise that international volunteering is a specific form of voluntary action, that its ascendancy and success as a form of a long term programme is rooted in the mid 20th century. Many recipient countries were either under or only recently released from different forms of colonial rule. The deliberate denial of educational and health opportunities to communities under colonial oppression was scarcely unknown. The motivations of international volunteers, even if in some cases they hailed from the colonial powers, were regularly aligned with those experiencing the oppression.³² Even if the international volunteers wanted to do something meaningful, the context of the

³⁰ Development Initiatives, op cit p 14

³¹ David Lewis "Globalisation and international service: a development perspective" in *Voluntary Action, Vol 7 No2, 2005*.

³² See for example "To Whom it may concern", edited by Emma Judge and published by Skillshare International (2004), which documents experiences of international volunteers in Southern Africa during the apartheid era.

struggle or the building of a new society in the post colonial era provided a significant framework and informed the interventions.

In this sense the channelling of international volunteering towards technical assistance is determined by the combining pressures of the determined philosophy of development models and its impact on governmental donors and the increasingly vocal demands from Southern partners for better and required skills – in a context where the liberation struggles are no longer significant.

In the world of the early 21st century, is the traditional model of international volunteering the most appropriate form of voluntarism to meet those objectives? The evidence from the changing models suggests that in the case of technical assistance there is room for doubt. For example, on one hand the professionalisation of international volunteering, with its connection to expertise and consultancy opens up the model in different ways. Some of the skills are already available in the recipient countries, so why not focus on national volunteering? Why not use other forms of technical assistance consistent with the electronic age? Why not focus on short-term placements combined with a level of virtual/on-line support?

But capacity building seems to have a little more going for it, recognising that systems as much skills development is an important part of sustainability for organisations. The emergence of new variations have successfully demonstrated the potential of this approach. But there is a fork in the road. One way places the IVCO as the capacity building provider, the interface between partner organisations and the sources of capacity building expertise – and maybe the IVCO will be one of those sources; the other places the IVCO as a facilitator of partnerships, enabling the direct linkages between the capacity builders and partner organisations. There are choices to be made here.

What will be the focus of international volunteering and co-operation?

The objectives of international volunteering and co-operation – solidarity, aid and development, personal development and public engagement – are as evident and contradictory as ever. The location of development objectives in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the focus on poverty reduction tend to give a technocratic emphasis to the work. Yet the centrality for international volunteering of social change, a softer expression than solidarity, is readily identified. This suggests a good mixture of pragmatism and principle will be required:

“Whatever the future holds, two things are perhaps clear. Firstly, that the concept of international volunteering will secure its future by continuing to demonstrate its flexibility; and, secondly, that the concepts of mutuality and global citizenship will need to take centre-stage in our thinking about the future”³³

In reality, the influence of the poverty reduction development agenda is paramount. But this may itself come under pressure as we approach 2015 and the MDGS are not met. Mobilising the collective energy of people, the practical consequence of global citizenship, may emerge as increasingly important. The increased prominence of the

³³ Rockcliffe, op cit p 43

public engagement objectives may well be supplemented by models of building active global citizenship throughout the international volunteering programmes.

But looking to the future would not be complete with at least a glance the expansion of international volunteering elsewhere, notably in Asia. In Japan, JOCV have long had international volunteering programmes, which broadly follow the traditional model, but in recent years we see the emergence of new programmes from countries such as Korea, Thailand, Singapore and, of course, China. Such programmes are a reflection of the economic wealth of the Asian economies and some clearly follow the economic interests of the state in those countries. However, there is also another aspect – which is even more demonstrated in the new member states of the European Union – of opening up a dialogue with other parts of the world and enabling their citizens to engage and understand what is happening outside their own reality.

The volunteers of the future

There is no evidence to suggest that there is a shortage of people who wish to become international volunteers, but where they come from is changing. The movement to more global programmes, breaking down the nation state model, is likely to gather pace over the next few years. The focus on facilitating partnerships, and a greater flexibility in the length of placements, will also serve to open up new forms.

Wherever IVCOs seek out their own niche – for example as deliverers of development or facilitators of partnerships – they will need to respond to a more complex demand for international volunteering, which may generate significant challenges for the nature of the operational activity of some IVCOs, their organisational culture or even constitutional arrangements.

The consumerist model is potentially going to change the relationship between the volunteers and IVCOs to one where the volunteer buys a service – and one that adds value to the option of doing it themselves. There is no monopoly gateway in the world of internet consumerism.

The ability of prospective volunteers to engage in significant pre-departure knowledge of the challenges to be faced is greater; the ability to secure knowledge of where they are going is greater; for many in the North the ease of moving between different cultures also greater. But also, the media offering the ubiquitous nature of culture changes the debate – the discussion is less about “Tell me about Manchester United and football” than “Did you see the game last week.”

IVCOs need to consider whether their systems are keeping pace with current reality or they will struggle.

Finally, the varying objectives of programmes and the different volunteers that this implies need to be recruited, possibly from all over the world pose significant logistical challenges. Is this beyond the capacity of even some of the larger organisations? Does an international model demand truly international organisations in the North as well as the South?

**Major changes in the last five years for volunteer sending organisations:
continuing preoccupations and newer issues as identified by the
Development Initiatives survey 2006**

- Short rather than long term placements.
- Whilst there may not be as many volunteers willing to take up a two year placement, there is evidence to suggest that more and more potential volunteers interested in working overseas.
- The fact that Southern partners should be central in defining their skill requirements when selecting volunteers is not new. Changes have been reported however in the sort of skills requested by Southern partners. For instance, a move away from technical assistance and 'gap filling' towards concepts around exchange, capacity building and local skill development.
- An area where IVCOs have found a particularly strong niche is in development education, advocacy and public engagement. Many IVCOs maintain strong links with returned volunteers which gives them a large pool of individuals who are keen to remain engaged with international development issues.
- The implications of migrant and diaspora communities for international volunteering were raised by IVCOs in this years survey.
- IVCOs are working on innovative recruitment processes in response to the changing environment.
- There is increased need to measure and demonstrate impact of individual volunteer placements and international volunteering as a whole.
- Competition between IVCOs for funding support remains an issue. However, there are examples of IVCOs collaborating and joining together.
- Fundraising and funding remains a key preoccupation evident and has consistently been an issue over the last five years.
- There is a shared sense of movement in certain directions: towards greater professionalism, towards more clearly defined roles and contribution to the development process.



FORUM Members

Association Française des Volontaires du Progrès (AFVP)
Australian Volunteers International (AVI)
Canada World Youth
Canadian Crossroads International (CCI)
Canadian Executive Service Organisation (CESO-SACO)
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